

To: FCC (Docket 05-311)
From: Paul Fassbender, Westford, MA
Date: 11/13/2018

Subject: **Please do not reduce public access funding by redefining franchise fees**

The proposed change would apparently reduce the funding available for community access television by the amount of “in-kind contributions.”

This would produce a clear cost savings for the providers, but place towns in the unfortunate position of having to decide whether to make up the difference through budget cuts elsewhere or tax increases – or to reduce services.

The long-standing funding model has worked well, producing many clear benefits to the town and citizens. I have participated in several committees and volunteer activities and have personally noticed the following benefits:

1. Increased voter participation. Town meetings and key board meetings (Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, etc.) are televised live on our local PEG channels and archived for streaming over the internet by WestfordCAT. Voters who can not attend in person have the option to watch live or see the entire meeting later, at their convenience. This is especially helpful for seniors and disabled residents, who have access issues or do not leave the house after dark. Families also can watch the meetings while caring for their young children.

Recently, while working on proposed property tax exemptions for seniors, low-income and disabled residents, I received many comments from residents who would not have participated in the process if they hadn't seen the discussions at Board of Selectmen meetings on TV.

2. Increased resident participation in local events and programs. Several town departments routinely use WestfordCAT to inform the public of upcoming events and programs.

The Westford Cameron Senior Center and Recreation Department use WestfordCAT to improve participation in their many programs. The Friends of the Cameron Senior Center (a 501(c)(3) organization), uses WestfordCAT to connect with residents for fundraising activities

3. Better coverage of local news. WestfordCAT covers town issues in much more detail and with more local understanding than the regional or national media.

There are many other benefits, I'm sure will be reported in other comments.

Please do not tinker with success by changing the definition of franchise fees to reduce the funding available to towns from the franchises – for the benefit of the providers.

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